

Hanoi's Strategy: Getting out on Schedule

Hanoi in August 1985 followed up its 1984-85 dry season offensive designed to cripple the resistance with an announcement of a 1990 deadline for withdrawing its troops from Cambodia. Subsequently, it embarked upon an ambitious project of constructing physical barriers against resistance infiltration corridors, building up the PRK military and gradually substituting PRK units for SRV ones guarding the border. Although it is difficult to gauge precisely how effective this program has been, the disintegration of the KPNLF and the generally decreasing military activity of the resistance within Cambodia suggests that it may be having its desired impact.

Politically, Hanoi's efforts have focused on Sihanouk, believing that if he could be detached from the resistance, its political standing within Cambodia as well as its international status would be severely undercut. The Hun Sen-Sihanouk talks, although they have been suspended for the moment, suggest that the Prince was tempted by the prospect of working out his own deal with the PRK and his interest in this type of arrangement could again be rekindled.

Hanoi may also have hoped that picking off the Prince from the resistance would isolate the KR and refocus the world's attention on the possibility of the return to power of that heinous crew. Pressure would then build on both Beijing and Bangkok to control and ultimately defang the KR's potent military capability as part of a settlement. US recent public emphasis on the importance of assuring that the KR does not return to power and Beijing's responsive statements may lead Hanoi to believe that this tactic is working.

Hanoi could well interpret the current realities in Cambodia as evidence that its strategy is working and that a realistic possibility exists that by 1990 Vietnamese "troops," with perhaps some left behind covertly, will be out of that country, leaving the PRK perhaps with Sihanouk in a cosmetic leadership position, in charge.